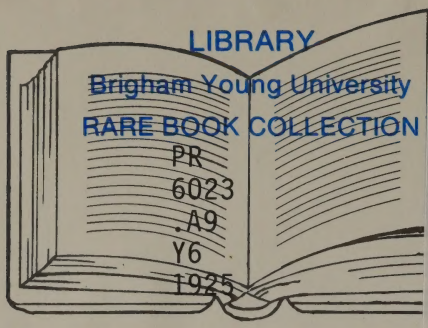
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THE YOUNG MAN DANCES
AND OTHER POEMS

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THE YOUNG MAN DANCES AND OTHER POEMS

by

JAMES LAVER

JOHN CASTLE

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TO
MY STEPMOTHER
WITH
LOVE AND GRATITUDE

They Say, My Muse . . .

THEY SAY, My Muse, no elfin echoes haunt you ;
That you are city-bred, and wander through
The streets of pleasure, not the lanes of fancy.
My Muse, it is not true !

Have we not sought the embowered inland valleys,
And scaled sea-cliffs, where the salt mosses grow ?
Have we not passed wide plains, and wider oceans,
And desolate slopes of snow ?

We have known the silence of the desert places,
The cloistral peace of woods, the lands that lie
Untrodden through the circling of the Seasons,
Under the Northern sky.

Have we not watched the solitary vulture
Hover above the Pyrénéen steep ?
And heard the infinite sadness of Réveillé,
Calling the camp from sleep ?

We have sat, hands folded, in the Winter twilight,
When round the eaves the goblin-tempest blew,
And known despair and terror, hope and healing,
The starlight, and the dew.

Poets there are who woo the Muse in season,
And pledge their troth, yet leave her, soon or late.
They walk the streets wearing her painted picture,
But take another mate.

Mine is a wife for every place and weather.
I guard her smile, remembering her frown:
It is in sign of my devotion to her,
I bring My Muse to Town.

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The Usher

Open the door there, Simpkins. Here they come !
And Mrs. Jenkyn, who is first, of course,
With those two awful girls. She does her bit
To get them paired before the crowd arrives.
This way, ma'am, MRS. JENKYN !
Johnson, quick !
Run down the steps and help Sir Horace out.
Old rip he is ; his days 's done long ago,
But that don't matter. Well ! it's just as well ;
We're always short of men. Women are worse !
They'll dance into their graves before they'll stop.
SIR HORACE BLADES ! This way, ma'am.
LADY BLADES !
Here's Mrs. Juddington—Flo Flick that was.
She never could act, but she had a face ;
And a head too, to make him marry her.
There's brains for you ! *Yes, ma'am, I'm very well.*
Your husband well, ma'am ? Precious lot she cares !
Why does she go about with that old corpse,

Sir Blasted Heath, the Lyceum actor chap ?
I saw him once in " Should a Husband Tell ? "
Then he went on the films and made his pile ;
He's worth a quarter of a million now.
I don't object. He's nice enough to me.
Not like that cub who's paying off his cab,
And never did a hand's turn in his life,
But thinks he's lord of half the Universe,
Because his pa makes pickles ! *Evening, Sir !*
The cloakroom's on the left, Sir. Thank you, Sir.
That's a nice bit of skirt. My Gawd ! The goods !
And here's another blooming gilded youth :
Thinks he's the Prince of Wales.
Old Jonathan,
Who had this job before me, used to make
A lot of chaps like that. Quite soft he was
On what he called the aristocracy.
He told me off for two hours at a stretch,
All about loyalty, because I said
A gentleman is only me dressed up,
With twenty times the cash, and half the sense.
His kind's died out. They don't know what they've lost.
This is a democratic age, *I* say.
Jones, what the blazes are you grinning at ?
Don't talk to me ! I'll make you know your place.
I'll get you turned off, sure as I'm alive.
Look slippy now ; you're not one of the guests,
And don't you think it. Blasted idle fool !
This way, Ma'am. No, the band's about to start.
Give me your cloak, Miss. I will tell the maid.

Bitter Eighteen

JEHOSHAPHAT ! What surging seas
Of men and women ! Eight or nine
Stern footmen take my name, and freeze
The last recesses of my spine
With scornful glances. Line on line
Of people stare with fishy eye.
My scalp feels like a porcupine.
Why did I wear a made-up tie ?

I'm going groggy at the knees ;
I feel a cold sweat undermine
What pluck I had ; by slow degrees
My shirt grows sodden ; bitter brine
Touches my lips, my temples shine
With moisture, but my tongue is dry.
Water, this moment, would be wine:
Why did I wear a made-up tie ?

I simply *must* appear at ease
The ball-room, after all, is fine.
I like those pots of flowering trees
With branches among which they twine
The Chinese lanterns. The design
Of everything is good, but I
Can still do nought but sweat and pine
Why did I wear a made-up tie ?

Envoy

Prince, out of pure caprice you dine
In riding-breeches ! Tell me why
Such misery dogs this lapse of mine:
Why *did* I wear a made-up tie ?

Sweet Forty-five

Chaperon, Old Style

How are you, Emily? It is such an age!
But don't let's talk of ages, if you please.
I'm sorry I began. I'm seventy-five
To-night, if I'm a day, and I shall feel
At least a hundred when the girls are tired
And willing to go home. Don't talk of it!
You've been abroad, of course? How rash of you
To bring dear Kate to England! With her gifts,
She would have found some nice young man out East,
And not sent up the price of husbands here.
Forgive my banter, won't you?
That's Miss Turl,
In that queer frock. So arty! Made at home;
You take my word. She's dreadfully in love
With that young fellow she is dancing with.
Oh! well, he's canny—doesn't like the bait.
It's—in your ear—a trifle second-hand!
You know who he is, don't you? Molly Bounce—
Oh! quite a scandal—she was on the Halls,
So long ago—my mother used to say.
And there is Major Slatterdash! I heard,
The other day, he'd given up the girl
He used to live with, and a good thing, too.
I saw her once—the doll-faced little minx!

They say that Gambage keeps her—your old flame.
Now don't deny it, darling, for it's true:
You told me so yourself once.
What a band!
And how absurd this modern dancing is!
No grace, no rhythm! and this negroid tune!
It's not quite proper, darling, don't you think?
Why can't they waltz as we did? Even now
I have a soft spot for the Viennese.
They could write music, anyway; not this
Prolonged cacophony for motor-horns
That everybody likes so. And the men!
Such bounders come here nowadays, I think.
There's hardly one that doesn't earn his bread.
Do you remember dear old Charlie James?
He hated labourers, *he used to say.*
Poor man! He put his last sou *on a horse,*
And lost it too; and then he went abroad.
Nobody's seen him since. He always wore
An orchid in his buttonhole. Poor chap!
He looked so manly *in a brown frock-coat.*
We used to meet at Ascot.
Emily!
Do you remember Kitty Sniper-Browne?
You know, the gawky girl with yellow eyes!
Well, that's her daughter straddling in front,
The image of her mother—only worse!
And that straight gown the silly creature wears,
Makes her look like a may-pole. Though they say
It is the fashion now to hide the bust.
Silly, I call it. What's a woman for?

In our day every feature had its chance.
The dressmakers are lazy, that's the truth,
And call their idleness "slim lines in dress."
It's my belief there's nothing looked so well
As that thin waist they used to make us wear.
It hurt at first, but—what's a woman for?
I always *say. And those long, white kid gloves!*
They don't wear gloves at all now, so it seems.
I've heard Dick say that in South Kensington
The men don't, either! Horrid! Don't you think?
But they've no taste now, lost it in the war,
Going about with landgirls and cocottes.
But it's the women's fault—it always is.
They ought to wear their dress bunched up behind,
Drawn tight in front to show the figure off;
With leg-of-mutton sleeves—a horrid phrase,
But a good fashion—with the bodice low,
Just at the edge of safety—as we did.
The dance is over; now they'll sit and talk,
And gobble ices, and make eyes, and flirt.
It's very much the same thing, after all,
Only they do not talk so well. No wit!
That fled the country when King Edward died.
Here comes your daughter, with a pink young man.
How well she looks! So blooming!
Dearest *Kate!*

Chaperon, New Style

Of course! I couldn't think of sitting out.
I just love dancing! Once I'm on the floor,
I'm tireless until midnight—and beyond.
Don't stop for me. I think it terrible
Of women to sit out with you young men,
Knowing you hate it so. I love a waltz!
I'm glad I didn't live in those dull days
When chaperons talked scandal by the wall,
And went to sleep, and never shared the fun.
It's best for everybody if we dance;
It gives the girls a rest.
I love *jazz bands!*
Don't you? There's so much go and life in them.
The floor is rather crowded. Never mind!
I love *a crush. A little overdone?*
It's cooler on the stair-case? Silly boy!
I do believe you're making love to me!
I well remember when I first came out,
I got no peace. The men were round like bees.
I'm sure that all men like vivacity.
I was vivacious then. *These modern girls*
Are sometimes so insipid, don't you know?
I wonder what the fellows see in them.
Or, if they're not, they're forward. I should hate,
If I were you, to chatter politics
With some of these high-brows in spectacles.
Socialists, most of them! I don't mind that.
Thank God I'm *not old-fashioned. All the same,*
There is a limit somewhere, isn't there?

Surely they needn't wear such low-heeled shoes.
Perhaps I'm treading on your corns? Ha! ha!
I do believe you're blushing! Probably
You have your eye on some nice Girton girl
Who took a first in—Anthropology.
You don't mind chaffing, do you? Between friends—
We are *that, aren't we? No one ought to mind.*
I've known some men who'd get in quite a rage,
Almost before one had the time *to speak.*
One must say something; as I've said to George:
George is my husband; he's a nice old thing,
But getting on now. He was middle-aged
When we were married. I was quite a girl,
Just seventeen. I've often wondered since
What made me have him, for I had no need.
The men were round—
Oh, dear! of course we'll go
Down to the buffet. I'd just love *an ice.*

The Light Dragoon

This is our dance I think, Miss——er——Of course ;
I've got you down as "pink dress"—do you mind ?
Bit of a fool at names ; mine's Trumpington.
She might at least remember that, I think.
Well, shall we dance ? There's no one on the floor,
I'm not afraid of that. Why waste the band ?
Is what I say. By Jove, she's light as air,
And pretty ankles, too ; I'm glad I came.
She's better than the hag I danced with last ;
The bleeding woman almost broke my arm,
And reeked of cheap whore's scent. *I quite agree,*
The floor is rather decent, and the band's
Not bad at all. I danced to it last night
At Lady Bluttenstein's. That little Run
I'm rather proud of, has a good effect
On anybody watching. Oh, my God !
There's Barton, who can't dance for rotten eggs ;
I don't know why he comes. And just to think,
I owe that little cad two hundred pounds !
Damn ! a false step. *Sorry, my fault, I think.*
Dancing, you musn't think of other things.
And why I should, God knows, while I can hold
A little girl like this ! Wish I could see
Her face, but just this bit of ear and hair
Shows what she's made of. Now we'll do a whirl.
I'm getting dizzy with her. Bah ! you fool.

She's just like all the rest. *How well you dance,*
If I may say so. Do you dance a lot ?
Shall we walk backwards here ? These clumsy fools
Keep getting in my way. Now whirl again !
I want to feel that thrill I felt before,
Like an electric shock right down my spine,
When our knees touched. My God ! I wish I could
Carry her off, strong arm round supple waist.
Her hair is scented, too, like—new-mown hay
Snuffed in at dawn, riding to hounds at home.
Why do these damned conventions hold me in ?
Wish I had lived five hundred years ago,
When men were men, and how to use a sword
Was all that mattered ; not a lot of stuff
Mugged up from books to prate in drawing-rooms.
God ! I can picture it ! A waiting horse,
A turret broken into, then to ride
Down forest paths for ever ; in my arms
This that I hold now, this warm human thing,
Closer than this by ever such a small
Dividing space, in sweet abandonment :
Wild speed beneath me, and a bursting heart !
This is the best tune they have played to-night.
Very well known—I can't recall its name.
I never can remember things ; can you ?
I wouldn't stop for worlds. *Ah ! that's the end.*
Bother ! but shall we clap ? No, it's no use.
The band will want its supper. Are you booked ?
Then may I have the pleasure ?—Good for me !
I'm not a talker, but—I think a lot !

The Poet

IN A corner of the ball-room rich with light,
The Poet sat, and watched the couples come
Wheeling towards him, graceful, airy, free.
His heart rejoiced within him as they came:
White arms and flimsy frocks, and slender men—
Slim lines of black that set the colours off—
And rhythmic motion in itself was good
To watch. He smiled benignly. Then a voice,
A fat and cultured voice, beside him said:
"You don't dance, Mr. Seegrove? Here's my niece."
He got up with a languid, "Charmed, I'm sure,"
And saw the chaperon. He'd met her once
At someone's dinner—couldn't quite think where.
Her ample bulk almost concealed her charge,
Who, after all, was pretty. But he said,
"I'm sorry, not! I never cared to learn.
Indolence is my curse, but—shall we talk?"
The chaperon had left them, and the girl
And he sat down together, and they talked.
He spoke about the weather; she replied
Monosyllabically, and they found
That their agreement on the season's crops
Was perfect, and their unanimity
About the need for speedy rain, complete.

He found that she exactly shared his views
That winters now are warmer than they were
When she was small—" So Mother says, at least ! "

But who was this tall, swaggering grenadier ?
Ah, yes ! He'd come to claim her for a dance.
The Poet made his bow, and then relapsed
Into his seat, and, half-abstractedly,
Glanced at his watch. " Good heavens ! ten
o'clock ? "
Late hours he hated, so he rose and went,
Avoiding all the dancers, down the stairs,
And in the buffet had a glass of milk—
His stomach at this late hour couldn't stand
Anything stronger—found his hat and coat,
And stepped out, meditating, to the street.
All the way home a tune rang through his head,
And, half-unconsciously, as poets will,
He found the words adjust themselves and run
In lines and stanzas. When he reached his flat,
Instead of going to bed he switched the light
On in his study, sat down at his desk,
Rested his chin on both hands for a space,
And gazed upon the wall-paper ; then took
His pen to write, and this is what he wrote :—

All the desires of a Youth's long loving
Burned to a single point of flame.
My lips were dry of an ancient drouth.
I saw in the darkness the red gleam moving ;
It parted and quivered, was never the same.
I pressed towards it, and found—your mouth !

Oh, what finding! The darkness closes
Around our limbs, but the burning tips
Of caressing fingers hold all delight;
The sheen of marble, the breath of roses,
And the sweetness of your parted lips—
Hearing and tasting, scent and sight.

Oh, what finding! Oh, what sweet meeting!
Two clouds that embrace in the western sky,
To melt in the sunset, are not more one.
More loudly I hear your quick heart beating
Than my very own. I am no more I,
But a melting mist in a stronger sun.

Down through a roaring torrent going,
Falling, falling, while heart and brain
Reel with the hoarded surfeit of bliss!
Yet the dizzy whirl cannot ease my knowing—
Knowing so poignantly seems a pain—
How velvet-smooth your shoulder is.

How smooth and white, though no light glances
Over its surface, no cold ray
Breaks through the scented warmth of the dark.
But I know that a scarlet wound enhances
Its driven snow, ere it pales away,
Where my hot kissing left its mark.

Oh! you are slipping, fading, escaping!
Are you only a phantom, a fancy, a dream?
Your limbs dissolve, your colours pale,

Leaving naught but the darkness gaping,
Peopled with hooded shapes that seem
To mock my sorrow—I thirst, I fail!

He read it through ; then very carefully
He crossed the " t's " and dotted all the " i's,"
And wrote the date and title at the top ;
" I think I'll call it ' Succubus,' " he said.
Then rose up from his chair, and from a drawer
He took the medicine for his cough, and poured
A measured dose. Then, switching out the light,
He passed into his bedroom and undressed,
And went to sleep abruptly, like a child.

The Débutante

Italics—as before—are what was said.
The rest of it went on inside her head.

Oh! rather! . . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . *Oh! rather!* . . .
. . . . . .
Oh! rather not! . . . . . .
. . . . . .

* * *

. . . . . .
Oh! rather not! Of course not! Rather! Let's!

Cloak-Room

THE SHOW is nearly over, what a shame !
It's been all right, it's nearly four o'clock.
I like to stay up late, but I'm so tired,
And have to work to-morrow.
It was fine
To see the ladies and the gents go in ;
And some so beautiful, I felt my heart
Stop, just to look at them. My ! it was fine.
The cloaks they had ! one in particular,
On a most lovely lady, all white fur
With sparkling things set round it, and her neck
Had rows and rows of pearls, and such dark hair
She had, and lots of rings, and silver shoes—
I wish she was my mother ! Three or four
Of the gents' cloaks were ripping, too. The chap
Who called me " Buttons " had a lovely one,
Quite black outside, and all red silk within.
I'd wear it inside-out if it was mine.
I wonder why men don't ; the soldiers do,
And no one seems to mind.
I hope I'll get
Some tips as they go out; I want to buy
A wireless set for mother, Willie Jones,
The other page-boy, has a gramophone,
With all the Latest every night at home.
I guess a wireless set would cut him out !

It's cold out here, and that old butler brute
Won't let me watch the dancing through the door.
What does it matter when there's no one sees ?
He'd like to keep the party to himself,
Greedy old pig ! I'll get his job some day,
And give the page-boys something for themselves.

* * *

Oh, there's " the King ! " And now they'll come in crowds,
And fight and be impatient. Here they come !
Your opera-hat, sir ? What's the number, please ?
Yes, Sir, it's seventy-four—the other one ?
Certainly, Sir. One moment, if you please !
You had a stick ? Shan't keep you waiting, Sir.
And here's the lady with the lovely cloak.
I wish she'd speak to me, and say " Good night ! "
One-seven-four ? I wish they wouldn't push.
It's like a match at Wembley. *Here you are !*

* * *

It's almost over ; only three to come,
And here comes one. There's only two coats left.
Your overcoat, Sir ? No, Sir ! please, Sir ! Don't !
The other coat is yours, Sir ! Half a crown ?
Not bad ! *Good night, Sir ! Thank you, Sir ! Good night !*

Danse Macabre

MORTALS! Away, away!
Look! it is almost day;
  Leave us an hour at least.
What though we are but shades,
Till the last lustre fades,
  We, too, would share the feast.

Too soon the cock will crow.
Guests, will ye never go?
  When will the floor be free?
Old beau and chaperon
Give each a heart-felt groan,
  Tired of your revelry.

Courage! they pass, they fade,
Joyously, unafraid,
  Come from your hiding now:
Ghosts from each age and clime
Step out the dance in time,
  Circle, and pause, and bow.

The spectral band takes shape,
Sepulchral measures ape
  Dance ditties old and new.
Hark how the music sets
Crotals and castanets
  Sounding the chamber through!

See, ceremonious, slow,
Vauquelin des Yveteaux
  Dancing the saraband.
What though your bones are cold?
Come, gallants, as of old,
  Take each your lady's hand.

Quickly the ages spin,
Modes may come out and in:
  Grace is immortal yet!
Lords, by your leave, the floor!
Here is the Pompadour
  Treading the minuet.

Bonaparte's come and gone.
Come, then, the *cotillon*
  For the last Bourbon King!
Then, if you're fickle still,
Waltz, polka, or quadrille,
  As shadow-years take wing.

Gaily we wake again
Youth's pride and lovers' pain,
  Passions dead long ago.
Now is our hour of bliss—
But what procession's this,
  Advancing calm and slow?

Troops of old women come,
Each with her pail and broom.
  This is the sign of morn!
Our love, and joy, and lust—
Tremble!—was mouldering dust
  Long before these were born.

Hark to the ruthless clock !
Listen ! the crowing cock !
  Every ghost catches breath.
Give me my gown of fur !
Cold is the sepulchre ;
  Cheerless the House of Death.

Finale

CART-LOADS OF cabbages crawl to Covent Garden
At four of the clock in the Autumn morning.
I, belated reveller, strolling westward,
They meet at the end of the Brompton Road.
It would have been worth while taking a taxi,
But the moon, and my lack of pence allured me.
My head is clear, but my feet are aching,
And the pavement's hard for my tight dress-shoes.
From each arc-lamp a shade fantastic
Circles around me, blends, and vanishes.
My cylindrical hat's silhouetted strangely
On the level pavement, the dinted wall.
This boulevard-sidewalk reminds me of Paris ;
And, as I pass them, the trees shed slowly
Their withered leaves, and my thoughts, withered,
Float to the ground from the boughs of the mind.
Red and golden they gleam in falling,
Beckon to memory, swirl behind me,
Blown by the weary wind that strips me,
Leaf by leaf, for the Winter of sleep.
The coffee-stall at Hyde Park Corner
Fed the soul with a wealth of radiance.
Now there is only the moon to guide me :
Only the moon, and the punctual arc.
Ah, my memories ! as they leave me,
Waken a scent, and I see before me

A lock of hair, and, underneath it,
One small ear with its pendant pearl.
Women's white shoulders from cloth of silver
Rise and tremble, are blurred and vanish,
Float before me, evoking fragrance.
Here comes a cabbage-cart once more.
The man on the box is swathed in a great-coat;
For him, chill morning; for me, cool evening.
Cool and sweet, from the heated ball-room
I walk westward, while he rides eastward:
He, to his labour; I, to rest.
Contrast is ever the pulse of dreaming!
We are two creatures, kinsmen, brothers,
And yet divided as night and daybreak,
Set asunder as land and sea.
I, with my subtlety, searching, probing
Every face for its guarded secret;
He, with a drowsy, rounded instinct,
Somehow nearer the soul of the world.
Can I not fathom them—these my puppets?
Let the light, in turn, of fancy
Play on their multitudinous facets,
Show the jewel of life complete?
Here I have them, labelled insects,
Moths of the cabinet, pinned down duly.
This, behold! had genital organs,
This had nothing inside its head.
Here the bloom was brushed from the pinions,
Here are scorchings that proved the candle,
Here are the markings that would elude me,
Mimicking death—well! Now they are dead.

Am I merely entomological,
Walking home from an evening's hunting,
Finding folly and leaving—nothing;
Making a desert and calling it Truth ?
If I blasphemed, O Life ! forgive me ;
Love, if I mocked you, turn not from me !
Peace, though I found you not, await me !
What if, amid the throng of dancers,
Two there were—and I half-believe it—
Found love more than a hot sensation,
More in life than an empty whirl ?
Five just men had ransomed Sodom ;
Two true lovers would lend Creation
Point and purpose, re-create it,
The unravaged garden of our youth.
Centre of peace in a clanging chaos,
Should they together gaze and listen,
The spheres would chant their fabled music,
The stars would spell the names of God.

You and I, O driver of cabbages,
Share a secret they do not guess at,
Those who were carried to Mayfair bedrooms,
With hardly a glimpse of the healing dark.
For me the wheel has come full circle,
And the soft night-wind, with caressing fingers,
Has chastened and calmed me, every wrinkle
Smoothed away from an envious brow.
You are, O Moon, no heartless flambeau,
Luring the world to a rout and a revel,

But a candle set in a cottage window,
Guiding the wanderer home to rest.

Here is the house ; I turn my latch-key,
Press the creaking door and enter,
And find, in the long hall's panelled darkness
The patient night-light burning still.

OTHER POEMS

Song for Music

WE WALKED through the meadows
When the light began to fail,
My love and I together,
And oh ! my love was pale !
Pale was her cheek then,
And cold was her brow ;
But oh, alas ! my darling,
For she is colder now.

We left the little cottage
Where the crickets chirruped loud,
And watched, across the gate-post,
The spider weave her shroud ;
And the little white moths fluttered
Before us in a cloud.
We wandered by the streamlet,
And heard its waters flow,

And cast therein our blossoms,
  And idly watched them go—
A red flower and a white flower,
  Our destiny to show!
The red flower went a-sailing
  To the river far below;
But the white flower sank and settled,
  And gleamed in the stream like snow.

The red flower was my passion:
  The white flower is my woe!

The Wisdom of Youth

After Théodore de Banville

YOUNG MAN, advice is free !
Listen awhile to me,
For I am twenty-three !

Wisdom thy folly is.
Deny thyself no bliss ;
Find tender lips to kiss.

Love flowers, and mirth, and wine,
Beauty, and Spring divine ;
These—while they last—are thine.

Fate follows like a sleuth ;
Vain is the search for truth ;
Laughter thou hast—and youth.

I would not lead thee on
To my new horizon ;
Labour looms large thereon.

Joy wields a coarser sieve,
Time has no more to give ;
'Tis now or never—live !

Palls every scent and taste,
Pleasure's wine runs to waste ;
Gather your flowers in haste !

The Death of the Wizard

" LAY HANDS upon him," cried the King,
" And break his magic staff in twain.
" No more to my realm shall he bring
" Mischance, nor 'scape my wrath again.
" The Devil's reign is over, and the time
" Shakes free from one progenitor of crime ! "

The old man stood with scornful mien.
" No need to bind my hands," he said ;
" For were my might what it hath been,
" Bound or unbound, 'twould strike thee dead.
" But powers, e'en magic powers, decay at last,
" And mine, like the ebb-tide, are sinking fast."

The King stood in the water-meads,
Two boys in scarlet held his cloak ;
His banner, blazoned with his deeds,
Floated above him as he spoke.
" And now, at last," he murmured, " all my lands
" Are safe, with this foul wizard in my hands.

" No more my foes shall know the hour
" When I have gathered foot and horse.
" I have the Welshmen in my power ;
" No petty princeling bars my course
" Of conquest. O Magician, canst thou say
" What *my* foes are intending day by day ? "

The wizard smiled but said no word.
The King spoke to courtier near :
" Not yet my Royal Wife has heard
" This news. Go thou, and bring her here.
" She knows this fellow has been long my foe,
" And will rejoice that we have laid him low."

Swift sped the knight upon his quest,
As springs the greyhound after game ;
And swiftly, at her lord's behest,
The Queen and one attendant came.
" My Lord," she said, " I slept beneath a tree.
" What is't Your Majesty would have with me ? "

" Behold," the King replied, " a man
" Who still has laboured for my foe ;
" Told each event ere it began—
" For there is naught he doth not know."
" Truly ? " she said, with not all feigned surprise ;
And cast towards the man her stealthy eyes.

How bright she was that April morn !
How young she was, how tall and slim !
Her kirtle at its edge was torn,
So swiftly had she sped to him.
Her coif, thrown backward, made her seem more fair,
And there was apple-blossom in her hair.

Her cheeks were glowing with the sun,
  Her tresses were of polished gold ;
Her bodice was of silk, fine-spun,
  And through it could the eye behold
Her lovely form, where the white linen vest
Half hid, but could not match, the snowy breast.

The King took both her hands, and then
  Kissed the white petals on her brow,
And said, " I would all Christian men
  " Could be secure as I am now."
And from the wizard's withered lips was heard
A croak of laughter at that royal word.

The King turned at his bitter mirth,
  And swore by all the saints that sit
In heaven, and fiends that walk the earth,
  That he would know the cause of it.
" My Lord," the Queen exclaimed, " Thwart not
      his will.
" He still may have the power to do thee ill."

" Death," said the King, " may come and save
  " Thy body from the screw and brand ;
" For thou art too near to the grave
  " To blench at torture. By this hand,
" If thou wilt tell the reason of thy glee
" Frankly and truly, thou shalt wander free."

" My thanks," he said ; " for, as thou sayst,
" Death is too near to be afraid.
" I am in other hands. Thou mayst
" Do nothing with thy brand and blade.
" I learned, the last time that my craft availed,
" I shall be stoned, be drowned, and be impaled."

" What ? " cried the King. " For Peter's sake,
" Hast thou three lives, to lose all three
" At once, by stone, and stream, and stake ?
" Read me the rune how that may be."
" Nay," said the wizard, " keep we to our text.
" Dost thou forget one question in the next ? "

" True ! " he replied, " and, therefore, say
" What vision caused—if thou *canst* tell—
" Thy laughter, when I smoothed away
" These blossoms that became her well."
" Look in her eyes, and bid her tell to thee
" That which was done beneath the apple-tree ! "

A flood of sudden crimson dyes
Her cheek, where hungry lips had pressed.
The King looked in her shrinking eyes,
And saw her faithlessness confessed.
Grew cold and rigid, like a Druid stone
Set up to mark a worship that is gone.

And on the Queen's fair, downcast head
He looked with silent misery.
And then, "I would thou hadst been dead,
"Before this shame had come to thee."
"My Lord," she said, "I go to weep and pray,
"And wait thy judgment. Let it not delay!"

The old man and the King alone
Stood gazing in each other's eyes.
"Then" said the monarch, "Get thee gone!
"It is not meet that one so wise
"Should linger here. Go, use thy deadly wit
"To wreck the hopes of those who crave for it."

"We part, O King, nor meet again.
"But, for your mercy unto me,
"I give you glory among men
"And among women, not to see
"Into their hearts; but still with joy to note
"Smooth shoulders, and white arms, and dimpled throat.

"Thou shalt not care to probe in shame,
"Nor, over-curious, to prove
"The rouge upon the cheeks of Fame,
"The bone behind the lips of Love.
"Thou shalt confound the lovely and the pure,
"And in thine arms and wife shalt reign secure."

He passed with weary step and slow,
As one worn out with prophecy.
The silent monarch watched him go,
Then started from his reverie,
And called his court with " Let us not delay.
" Be merry, for we hunt the stag to-day."

The Queen returned along the track
Which led towards the castle door.
And shame and fear were at her back,
And bitter hatred went before.
She turned. The King and all his court were gone,
And the old man walked silent and alone.

She called a varlet in her pay,
And almost all her story told ;
And, pointing out the wizard's way,
Promised to buy his death with gold.
" Weakly, my Lord " she said, " was moved to give
" Him life. It is not meet that he should live."

The wizard paced the banks of Wye,
Then sat him down upon a mound,
And mused: " When comes the time to die,
" How hollow doth my wisdom sound !
" I would give all my magic lore to be
" That careless youth beneath the apple-tree !

" So dearly do we purchase sight
  " By suffering, that I could find
" My joy to share the wilful night
  " Of that poor monarch, weak and blind.
" Far richer seems each other life than my
" Poor history ! And, yet, I would not die."

The river took its winding way
  Thro' overhanging banks of fern.
'Twas still the spring-tide of the day.
  The sunlight seemed to pierce and burn
His withered frame ; so he arose and laid
His tired limbs in a green, luminous shade.

And there, where foliage wrapped him round,
  The woods were silent, nothing stirred.
Naught save the river's rippling sound
  And a far skylark's song was heard.
O'er the whole valley and the wooded hill
The wind stopped breathing, every leaf was still.

He lay there till the falling sun
  Had quenched its brightness in a cloud;
He saw the river darklier run,
  And in the air a sudden cloud
Of dancing insects ; from a neighbouring tree
A dismal owl cried out in prophecy.

Awakened by the night from sleep,
The death-moth fluttered round his head ;
And in the darkening thicket deep
He seemed to hear a stealthy tread.
Jaws snapped : the furry victim's shriek of pain
Died, strangled, and the woods were still again.

Then, on the crest against the sky,
Crouching, three forms of men appeared.
He knew the time was come to die,
And stayed his steps ; no longer feared
The inevitable end, but closed his eyes
And waited, while the hunters, in surprise,

To see their quarry calm and still,
Paused also, wondering what spell
His thin lips framed to do them ill.
But, at the last, remembering well
The promised gold, they hurled a mighty stone
Which struck his body, rending flesh and bone.

Upon a rocky bank he stood,
Swayed, stunned a moment by the blow ;
Then toppled backward, blind with blood,
To where the river foamed below
Through the King's weir: and all his pain found rest,
For a sharp stake cleft open heart and breast.

Thus was his prophecy fulfilled.
And those three who had wrought his death,
Knowing what wisdom they had killed,
Watched the dark stream with bated breath.
"Then," said the leader, "Haste we to our Queen,
"And tell her all that we have done and seen."

They found her in her chamber, set
With silken cloths and jars of gold,
And heard her say, "He will forget,
"By sundown, what the wizard told.
"Seeing no more the blossom in my hair,
"He will remember only I am fair."

So 'neath the Wye the wizard lay,
Its current swollen with Summer rain;
And the King put his wrath away,
And took her to his arms again;
And, while he slept, the Queen stole to her lover
In safety—for the apple-bloom was over.

The Burial of Shelley

A PEASANT, where the wooded Apennines
Nearest approach the sea, his burdened way
Pushed shoreward through the branches of the pines;
Then halted in dismay.

He saw the beach the recent storm had torn,
The broken toys of its mad revelry;
Saw the long arms of Spezzia and Leghorn
Encompassing the sea.

Saw, too, a little, sombre group of men
Who clustered where the shelving sand was drier;
They gathered wreckage of the storm, and then
Built them a solemn pyre.

What rite it was, he knew not; what old law
Of worship they fulfilled, of days long gone,
Around their shrine, he knew not; then he saw
A lifeless form thereon.

'Twas too far off the features to descry,
And he was old, his smoke-dimmed sight was weak;
But he could see, against blue wave and sky,
The pallor of its cheek.

Then silence fell; he saw the sudden flame
Between the knotted driftwood leap and shine;
And the dark watchers, calling thrice one name,
Poured frankincense and wine.

The smell of burning wood and balsams old
Obscured the bitter savour of the sea;
And he ran from them, fearful to behold
Such antique obsequy.

Night fell behind him as he fled away
From the strange odour and the mournful sound;
And all the forest murmurs died with day,
And silence lapped him round.

But, as along the winding track he passed,
A tumult rose behind him, and a cry,
As when some fiend his chariot drives, and fast
The leaves before him fly.

He turned and shrank into a thicket near;
His limbs had lost their use, a dizzy flame
Dazzled his eyes, his lips were dry with fear,
While on the whirlwind came.

One glimpse he caught of faces wild with mirth
In Dionysiac fury whirled away,
Like evil shapes at midnight, when the earth
Yields for awhile its prey.

A drunken ditty in an unknown tongue
Smote on his ear, tearing the hush of night
To tatters, and the carriage rolled along
The track, and out of sight.

'Twas vanished, and the darkening forest seemed
To hold its breath, so deathly still it grew.
The old man trembled, thinking that he dreamed
Of Satan and his crew.

Though strange things it was given him to behold,
How should he half the mystic rite divine?
Or know the face of Shelley, blue with cold,
Or Byron's, flown with wine?

But there was horror he could not forget,
A shadow that pursued him till he died;
And through death's shades he saw that burial yet,
And that demoniac ride.

St. Michael's Mount

MARAZION, market-jew!
Grey, straggling, and mysterious town:
Half courts, half hides away from view;
And here the cliff slopes sheerly down

To where the green, transparent sea
Clouds at its edge in milk of foam.
Grey town, did wanderers come to thee
Ere yet these isles had heard of Rome?

Swarthy, hook-nosed traders came,
Long ago, how long ago?
Brought you cloaks, as red as flame;
Brought you linen, white, like snow.

All the soul of roving ships
Clings around this little bay.
Ghosts of seamen, with blue lips,
Shriek athwart the flying spray.

Vain, against the Saxon horde,
Native valour, Roman wall.
Here the Briton sheathed his sword,
Bent his tattered sail for Gaul.

Watchers from these windows gazed
  Westward to King Philip's Main,
And here the first red signal blazed
  For the crescent-fleet of Spain.

Nearer comes the tale of war,
  Plainly written, all may read:
Broken oar and shattered spar
  Float among the pools of weed.

Oh! phantom men! Oh! iron coast!
  Oh! cliffs of granite that remain
When all the things we cared for most
  Are but sand-ridges after rain:

This rock shall stand beneath the stars
  When, with us, children's children sleep;
And all the clamour of our wars
  Is last year's thunder on the deep.

Lines on My Twenty-fifth Birthday

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, and never yet in love?
Oh! I have had my impulse like the brutes,
And built a dream upon it now and then—
Vain, wanton dreams like those of other men,
Stalks without sap, sham flowers with no fruits.
Twenty-five years, and never yet in love!

Twenty-five years! Many a man has died
Younger than that, and lived whole histories.
It is some fault in me that I alone
Those delicate agonies have never known;
Nor learned love's truths, nor plumbed its mysteries.
At twenty-five has many a poet died.

No poet, I: my heart is much too cold.
It beats not with the blood, it yields no scope
E'en to the curious brain, eager to know
If what all lovers say be really so.
Some day it may, but I have little hope.
No poet, I: my heart is much too cold.

Then saith my Evil Spirit, tempting me:
"Love looseth tongues. Seek love; it will repay
"Thy pains with profit. Canst thou not
rehearse
"A theme in more than tolerable verse?
"And love makes poets out of common clay."
Thus saith my Evil Spirit, tempting me.

I will not! though another twenty-five
Unfruitful years should yield me peace at last
By mere decay of nature. I'll not buy
The plant I cannot rear. No, not though I
Should add to the vain tale of Summers past,
Another and another twenty-five.

To the Unknown Goddess

"Strove hard to save the three spiritual forms, which have been recognised as the triad of the *True*, the *Good*, and the *Beautiful*, from confusion with the fourth form, still unknown, yet insidious through its indeterminateness, and mother of scandals."—CROCE.

AS I was roaming the hilly land
Where I was nurtured, my only world,
I came to a clearing in the wood,
A solemn grove and a triple shrine.

A colonnade made a crescent sweep
At the edge of the wood, and temples three
Reared white pillars in the air,
And a thin blue smoke went up from each.

I passed to a door in the left-hand shrine,
And saw a form on the tripod set,
With veiled face and with flowing hair;
I asked her name, and she answered, "Truth."

I knelt in worship, but weary grew
Of such curt prophecy, and strode
To the right-hand shrine, and asked again
"Who art Thou?" and for sole reply

She lowered her veil, and I beheld
The Beautiful. I knelt in fear ;
And slowly from her steadfast gaze
I slunk away, and left the shrine.

Then to the central porch I came,
And found a priestess old and bent,
Too paralysed to leave her stool.
Her name, she muttered, was " The Good."

Sick and faint I stumbled out,
And, at the confines of the wood,
Found a rough altar with a crackling fire.
And I demanded of the crackling fire :
" What art Thou ? " and it answered
" Ask thy heart ! "

On Hearing a Dead Man Overpraised

HE'S DEAD, and all, who knew him, swear
How good he was, how true, how staunch.
You'd never guess, to hear them there,
His sodden eye, his heavy paunch.

His torpor was his solid sense,
His virtues swell, his sins have shrunk.
We all remember his immense
Good-fellowship—when he was drunk.

Did they admire him above ground?
No, no! but, wisely, they mistrust,
Cold truth, and heap the common mound
Of lies above a tainted dust.

His character had many flaws
Which leaped, while living, to the eye.
They praise him fluently because
They did not love him—Is that why?

Such easy, empty kindliness
Is love's child never; love sees through
Pious pretendings—I confess
I've no illusions about you.

And yet I love you, if to love
  Is to stand empty by your side,
Hungry for crumbs, and see you move
  Alone, on mountains, deified.

If it is love to blush and stare
  At distant sight of you ; and, near,
To hang the head, and pant for air,
  And burn with shame, and chill for fear.

If it is love to know each tone,
  Each lock, each eye-lash ; and afraid,
Beggared to stand when you were gone,
  And doubly beggared when you stayed.

But, what then ? Had you brain, or wit,
  Or knowledge even ? When I heard
Your speech, my thin lips curled at it ;
  And yet I cringed, and said no word.

How should I cheat you with my praise ?
  You were not worthy it—and I
Loved you through aching nights and days ;
  But why, then ? Can you tell me why ?

Very Old is My Heart

MY HEART is very old ; around its root
The tendril of an antique passion clings ;
For it beheld—and trembled, and was mute—
The very dawn of things.

This heart that wanders, desolate, alone,
Through sombre woods where no bright passion is,
Had once the whole of Eden for its own,
And Lilith's lips to kiss.

It knew the mountain's chill, the desert's drouth,
The bitter joys of Circe's wandering isle ;
A clear-eyed Samson, pressed, with hungry mouth,
Delilah's traitor-smile.

Many long wars it knew, forgotten fights,
And homes of drowsy peace and amorous bliss ;
The scented gloom of Babylonian nights
In hanging terraces.

It sailed for Troy in Menelaus' ships,
And pierced the city's wide defences through ;
It knew the sweetness of white Helen's lips,
Aye, and of Cressid's, too.

With Ulysses beyond the farthest isles,
Still following westward the white sea-bird's wing,
It fled by coasts where noon and summer smiles,
And the lone sirens sing.

And when, tired out with warfare and alarms,
The deadly worm set royal Egypt free:
The lover, lost in Cleopatra's arms,
Was I, not Antony!

Is there no rest? Still must it wander on,
Finding new habitation? Yea, it must!
With the World's Love to the last horizon,
When this frail house is dust!

On the Shoulders of a Fair Puritan wearing, for Once Only, Her Gown Décollete

BEFORE, I guessed, but now I know
The whiteness of those slopes of snow,
Which, just for once, you deign to show.
For many a day and many a night
Soft clouds have hid them from my sight,
And given me naught but leave to guess,
Beneath the smoothness of your dress,
A finer-textured loveliness.

No traveller, who chafes to see,
From the low vale of Chamonix,
Across Mont Blanc the vapour lie,
Is half so discontent as I
Was ever like, I thought, to be.
But now the clouds that gathered there,
The veils your shoulders used to wear,
Have quite dissolved, and left them bare.

Would that upon that mountain-side
My happy finger-tips might glide,
Each one a trembling mountaineer,
To where the shoulder topples sheer—
Into I know not what abyss—
At that delicious precipice !

But this is metaphor too cold ;
You tempt my fancy to be bold.
You are a dryad peeping through
Her screen of boughs, intent to view
Some shepherd lost amid the trees ;
Till suddenly he turns and sees
More than she guesses, through the leaves,
Breathless with wonder, he perceives—
Almost, poor yokel, in alarm—
Sunlight on a dappled arm.
A zephyr stirs, and through the green
A milky shoulder-point is seen ;
And then, half-visible, half-guessed,
The shadowed contour of a breast,
Conjuring within the mind
The long white limbs that lie behind.

Lovely Puritan, you may
To-morrow, next, and every day,
Draw around your throat again
Silken curtains—but in vain.
For as one who walks a hill
Through the mist is conscious still
Of each hollow, mound, and stone,
If he loves them every one—
Hide your charms lest satyrs gloat—
Now I know them all by rote,
From the shoulder to the throat ;
Know the neck's fair, rounded shape,
And the ripple at the nape ;

See your shoulders, like a chain
Of far mountains, on my brain
Silhouetted, white and plain.
And of all their curves the best,
That sweet valley of the breast,
Where a man might find his rest.

The Formal Garden of My Heart

THE FORMAL garden of my heart
Was trim, and neat, and fair to see ;
The quickset-hedges clipped with art,
The flowers in rows, and every tree

Smooth-boled and tall, and in its place.
My careful hands had rooted up,
From the wide-terraced lawn, each trace
Of daisy and of buttercup.

And then there came, though winds were raw,
A stray seed blowing through the air.
And when I looked again I saw
Love's wild weed spreading everywhere.

I seized it with a ruthless hand,
Climbing along the garden wall,
And saw its strangled buds expand
Into sweet flowers, white and small.

I flung it down beneath my feet,
Where, sapless, it must wilt and dry.
Its tender leaves shrank in the heat :
I saw it wither, watched it die.

And so it troubles me no more.
  My garden blooms are trimly spread.
My parterre's cultured as before ;
  And love is dead, and love is dead.

. . . . . .

So said I, Love, not knowing then,
  While frailer plants my care employed ;
When love comes to the hearts of men,
  'Tis not so easily destroyed.

I Have Been Happy To-night

I HAVE been happy to-night,
Alone, with a volume of poems,
The author of which does not often intrigue me ;
And a French cigarette, and a glass of so-so Madeira,
And my patent gas-fire that isn't really luxurious,
And my leopard-skin rug that I bought long ago
as a bargain,
Two cushions, a couch—It is strange that our
human contentment
Can lie in contemptible trifles !

There are other contemptible trifles :
Your lips, and their way of smiling ;
Your eyes that refuse to receive me,
And your foolish hands that clasp and repulse me,
And the way the hair lies on your forehead,
And the throat merges into the bosom.
And when I think of these contemptible trifles,
Over my book and my glass of inferior liquor,
My heart gives a gasp of agony ;
The glass's stem breaks in my fingers,
And the book is stained with Madeira.

Strange, such contemptible trifles
As we are—at this time and distance,
Should break, and stain one another !

Reply to Serenade

BECAUSE THE night is none too dark,
And soon, too soon, the moon will rise ;
Because my Father's hound will bark
To wake the dead, or split the skies ;
Because my maid is vexed by dreams,
And wakens screaming in a fright,
Though nothing creaks but midnight beams—
I cannot steal away to-night.

Because my Father stroked my hair,
And touched my hand, and kissed my brow,
And said, " My daughter, once as fair
Your Mother was, as you are now."
Because before my bedroom shrine
Her pictured head was ringed with light,
And other accents prayed with mine:
I cannot steal away to-night.

Because, on Sunday, near my stall
A nun took up her humble place,
And bent her head, and I recall
The chastened sweetness of her face ;
Because she shamed my gaudy dress,
And all my vows seemed vain and light,
And I have looked on holiness:
I cannot steal away to-night.

Because my Father's horse is good,
  Because my Father's sword is sure,
And, if he followed through the wood,
  Your life, or his, the ill would cure ;
Because wild deeds should give us pause,
  And wrong is wrong, and right is right—
But most of all, I think, because
  I do not love you ! So, Good night!

Cromwell Road

"HOW LONG and dull" said Andrew Lang,
"The Cromwell Road can be!
"Where never free bird ever sang
"In any 'prisoned tree.
"How desolate" said Andrew Lang,
"The Cromwell Road can be!"

And yet, to-night, when, westward, to my fire,
From other people's books, I took my way;
The upper air was rich with purple gloom,
And all the lamps, like fire-flies, on a stem,
Just trembling into flight. The street gleamed wet,
A wide canal, built between palaces,
Stretching to ultimate distance, and, between,
Clove the huge cañon of the railway cutting—
Toppling in crags, and wonderful with stars.

To a Friend Who Proposed a Shared Lodging

THERE IS an hour when all things are asleep,
And an ember's fall is like the fall of a world,
And the heart with all its hunger is laid to rest,
The soul being bowed, an old crone, over the fire;
And all seems dead and empty. Then there comes,
In glimmering plumage veiled, felt more than seen,
The voice, the touch, the breath we call the Muse,
Because its name is too holy a thing to speak.
A touch, no more ; so that the morning doubts
What filled the night's horizon ; yet, it came !
And not for all the sweetness of shared ease,
Not for kind lips, for understanding eyes,
Not even for friendship's sake, lover, or wife,
Can we abandon that sharp ecstasy ;
The bitter hour, the moment that repays !

The Eyes of Love

LOVE HATH no eyes, he gave them both to me.
Naught stops my gaze ; thick velvet, sombre silk,
Are thinnest muslin to me ; I can see
Through the long sleeve the smooth arm, white as milk.
Love had keen eyes : he gave them both to me.

You are a lily bursting from its sheath !
Love guides me on, from prim and guarded throat,
To find the fair twin hills that dream beneath ;
Aye, and to snowy hollows more remote.
You are a lily bursting from its sheath.

Do clothes deceive me, now I have Love's eyes ?
Can I not see the rounded flanks, and those
Fair hills and vales encircling Paradise ;
The slender waist my two hands could enclose ?
Doth Love deceive me, now I have his eyes ?

I would arrest their vision if I might ;
Say, Pause a little here ; this whiteness, see
If you can match it with your dazzled sight.
In vain ! these eyes have gift of prophecy.
I would arrest their vision if I might.

Alas, my love ! Love's eyes can see too much.
That naked, spiny thing that will endure
When your firm flesh shall moulder at a touch.
Where I but guess, Corruption will make sure.
Alas, my love ! Love's eyes have seen too much !

The Mirror of Aphrodite

IN A dim Museum in a modern city
An old Greek mirror in a case is shown,
The handle bent, the surface green and gritty
As a lichen-covered stone.

Perhaps a chieftain, muscular and mighty,
Loved, in his generation, and renowned,
Gave you his mistress—Thy form, Aphrodite,
Upholds the perfect round.

Ere Hellas yet had fallen quite asunder,
This mirror, in a marble palace set,
Heard many murmur, "Am I fair, I wonder?"
And answered, "Fairer yet!"

Many bright eyes it saw, gazing demurely;
Many white teeth flashing in pride and joy.
Oh! so much gathered loveliness could surely
Outlive the noise of Troy!

If I scoured the brazen disk with oil and ashes,
Should I see again what once was mirrored there?
Should I see again white throat, red lips, long lashes,
And Helen's braided hair?

Song of the Corsairs

"Nous étions quatre-vingts rameurs."—*Les Orientales.*

WE CARRY in our vessel's hold
A hundred Christian fisher-folk.
They must learn to bear our yoke—
Spoils were ever to the bold!
Rulers of the Middle Sea,
What care we for captives' weeping?
In our pirate galley sweeping,
Eighty stalwart oars are we.

In the bow our keen look out
Sees a convent on the strand.
Down goes anchor, close to land.
Fire and sword, and have them out!
Such the Prophet's sure decree.
What care we for women's wailing?
In our pirate galley sailing,
Eighty stalwart oars are we.

The wind is up, we must away.
Weep not, thou little Christian fool!
Our Master's harem at Stamboul
Is worth the cloister any day.
Come, you will be just as free,
Pretty Slaves your long locks combing.
In our pirate galley roaming,
Eighty stalwart oars are we.

She clings unto the altar rail.
"Sons of Satan, will you dare?"
"Yea, by Allah, she is fair,"
Quoth the captain, "Hoist the sail!"
Vain is every plaint and plea,
Vain is convent wall and railing.
In our pirate galley sailing,
Eighty stalwart oars are we.

Her tears but make her fairer yet,
Her eyes are gems of worth untold.
She'll bring a thousand crowns of gold,
Arrayed and in the market set.
Behold the Sultan's bride-to-be,
Towards his palace hourly winging!
In our pirate galley singing,
Eighty stalwart oars are we.

Dream

I HAD a vision of Unchastity—
A woman's smooth white shoulder and small head,
With evil eyes that, yet, looked wearily;
Its hair and lips were red.

Half seen it was, yet those red lips and hair
Gleamed through the dark. I felt its bitter frown.
I dropped my eyes, and saw that body fair,
Scaled, from the navel down.

And as upon a huge fish in the net
The sea-lice squirm round every gill and fin,
A brood of obscene creatures, black, like jet,
Kept crawling out and in.

Spell-bound I gazed, and in the air arose
An odour of late lilies after rain,
And with it mingled the foul breath that blows
Over a field of slain.

The Shape still lingered, smiling; I, in awe,
Watched with a helpless eye its loathsome grace.
And then it came towards me, and I saw,
Oh, God! Your face! Your face!

We Met Again

DO YOU remember the Autumn weather,
Five long years ago and more,
When we harnessed the trap and drove together
Along the road by the curving shore?

I was clumsy, you told me frankly.
Little praise I had for my pains,
When I left the cheek-straps hanging lankly,
Bungled the collar, and fouled the reins;

You put all to rights in a minute
With nimble fingers (I blushed the while),
Said: "You didn't see anything in it,"
Then healed my wound with a sudden smile.

You, in your chrysalis, fluttered and fretted,
Eager as débutantes always are;
And I was only a day gazetted,
And very proud of my single star.

So we mounted at last, and drove together,
And I saw, with inattentive eye,
The mountain slopes of faded heather,
And the endless fir-trees sliding by.

There was sea, blue sea, beyond the shingle,
  But your eyes were a sunnier, purer blue ;
And the woods, and the hills, and the shore, were a single
  Jewel-setting, the jewel—you.

Where we were driving, I don't remember,
  Nor what was the road beneath the hill.
But the flame of your girlhood kindled an ember
  Which, fool that I am, is burning still.

Naught of our errand or purpose lingers,
  But we drove together, you and I ;
And I see the reins in your long, gloved fingers,
  And your slender shoulders against the sky.

Now I toil in the fickle city,
  While you ride hunting, gay and free ;
And are dancing and loving, more's the pity,
  In a hundred houses I never see.

But we met again for my perdition,
  In a house where brains are bought and sold.
We came to honour a Politician,
  Out of office and growing old.

They talked of Votes, and Things that Matter,
At Lady Thingummy's Party Rout;
But I turned away from their boring chatter—
And, across the room, I picked you out.

I looked at you as a lover gazes ;
I hardly think that you noticed it.
And you murmured a few polite, cold phrases,
And you didn't remember me a bit.

Narcissus—I

DAY WAS fading when he strode
Through the wood,
  Where he knew a fountain was ;
Cleft the screen of boughs in two,
Weary threw
  All his length upon the grass.

Young Narcissus o'er the brink
Stooped to drink ;
  Saw his face reflected there,
In the waters clear and cool
Of the pool ;
  Marvelled that it seemed so fair.

Marvelled at the soft surprise
In his eyes,
  At the knot of clustered curls,
At the sweet reflected sight
Of the white,
  Slender shoulder, like a girl's.

At the fine nose, straight and thin,
And the chin ;
  While the long line of the throat
In the crystal of the stream,
Like a dream
  Seemed to tremble and to float.

Then he knew a sharper thirst
Than the first.
  Through his veins a new desire,
For a joy he could not name,
Ran as flame,
  And consumed him like a fire.

Other loves he had despised,
Now, surprised,
  Suddenly he understands ;
Feels, encompassing his heart,
All their smart ;
  And he stretches out his hands,

Reaches trembling finger-tips,
And his lips
  Meet with lips as red as they.
And the mirror by his kiss
Broken is,
  And the vision melts away.

So he lies as still as death,
Holding breath
  Through what seems the flight of years ;
While the ripples hurry past,
Till at last
  The bright image reappears.

Lonely Echo lurks unseen
In the green
  Trailing plants that scent the air.
Mourns " I cannot speak at all
"Till he call,
  "And the boy is very fair."

Still he gazes at the stream,
Lost in dream.
Echo, in the thicket, grieves ;
Nothing sees but him, and hears
Her own tears
Fall upon the upturned leaves.

So, the gods looked down with rue
On these two,
And they sorrowed for their fate ;
So much love and so much pain
All in vain ;
Both so young and desolate.

So, they wrought, and from that hour,
His frail flower
By the stream is springing yet ;
And lost Echo's faint reply,
To a cry,
Murmurs of a vague regret.

Narcissus—II

PARENTS WERE kissed, good night was said,
Candle in hand he climbed the stair ;
Came to his room, squeezed past the bed,
And set his light upon a chair.

Before the wardrobe-glass he stood
And, languidly undid his tie,
And as he bared his throat, his blood
Thrilled suddenly : he knew not why.

With shaking hands he cast aside
Clothes one by one, while on the wall
His monstrous shadow flickered wide.
Then he stood still, erect and tall,

Before the wardrobe-glass, wherein,
Lit by the candle's wavering glow,
He saw his body, white and thin,
And trembled to be fashioned so.

Sick-shivering, as at some disgrace,
Saw, poignantly, and with surprise,
That pale and pointed flower—his face,
And two dark, haunted pools—his eyes.

Nearer he crept, while mouth and breast
  Steamed the clear glass and made it dim ;
And on that icy image pressed
  His quivering body, limb to limb.

Then, stumbling backward, loosed his grip
  Of the tall mirror, with a start ;
And felt a cold dew on his lip,
  And a new anguish in his heart.

Song of the Punch-Bowl

"Je suis la flamme bleue..."—HUGO.

I AM the flickering, dim
Blue flame around the rim!
  I come from southern France.
By crooked ways, scarce seen,
I lead to Kensal Green,
  Or Colney Hatch, perchance!

I mislead travelling men
Over dank marsh and fen,
  Tired, sodden, and dismayed.
Men call me "Fly-by-night,"
They see me with affright,
  And call the saints to aid.

Night drapes in dark the sky—
The pall of them that die,
  The cloak of him who sins.
Start revels! Music, there!
Ghosts, to the sepulchre;
  Maskers, the dance begins

Waiter, some punch ! I come !
Though I, myself, am dumb,
  I lend my fellows wit.
By silent, slow degree
I steal their modesty,
  And no man knows of it.

Drink, men and maidens, drink !
Although no maid, I think,
  Bears long my ardent kiss.
Where bones in charnel lie,
What shameless beds I fly,
  To join your revelries !

Others will taste your sweets,
Finish your broken meats,
  Drink all your liquor up.
Where others lie, there's room !
Lo ! I have left their tomb,
  To flicker in your cup.

On the Cherwell

HERE, WHILE the fleet hour flies,
Moored 'neath the bank I lie,
And watch, through half-closed eyes,
The punts go by.

They pass in an endless file,
The willows nod to the stream,
And I could deem for a while
The world a dream ;

The world a dreaming river,
Where the year grows never old,
And the sunbeams break, and shiver
Their scattered gold ;

Where the glass of Time is unshaken,
And half into slumber I fall
To the blackbird's warble, and waken
To the cuckoo's call.

Pinkhill Lock

BEFORE THE merchant-hand of Time
Has worn that golden image smooth,
I would recall a night we spent
Together. You recall it, too ?

Far from the academic streets,
You on the saddle, I beside,
In the low car ; against the wind
We sped along the Berkshire Road.

All day the town was walled with heat,
It was the prison whence we fled ;
Yet was the air, that whistled through
Our Summer garments, keen to chill.

Your face, in profile, sternly set,
Was tense with speed, and peered ahead ;
While the loose collar of your shirt
Flapped wildly round your open throat.

We passed a score of gaping men
On homeward bicycles, we sped
By Seven Bridges, and at last
Swerved to the right at Cumnor Hill.

By perilous turns, by winding ways,
Narrow the road became, and rough,
Until we stopped beneath a hedge,
And saw the lock, and weir beyond.

The throbbing engine left a void,
In ceasing, it was pain to fill.
We turned, forgetting it, and strode
Through the long grass, without a word.

The stream was silent, and the weir
Lost in such quiet depth, it seemed
The grave of sound, to swallow all
And leave the silence still complete.

And then the finger of the wind
Swayed the high trees, and from the copse
Rattled the night-jar, and a fish
Broke the smooth water into rings.

You cast your clothes away and stood
On the grass-carpet, cold with dew,
And flung the hair back from your face,
Tossing your arms aloft to plunge.

And in the sunset-glow the moon,
Slim crescent, delicately poised,
Showed like a white and slender boy
Bending his body for a dive.

But I dived first, in fear to stay
Alone upon the bank, and hear
The darkness take you, and the stream
And silence close above your head.

How cold it was ! how strange and chill!
So sweet, so passionate, so austere ;
Such subtle pleasure ebbed and flowed
Within my heart, regarding you.

We scrambled out, and the rough touch
Of towels sent the happy blood
Glowing within the slender form
That gleamed, green-shadowed, in the dusk.

The low sun flung his clouds away,
And o'er the far horizon's brim
Shot his last rays; you bathed in light;
Beneath your skin the muscles moved.

Then the first star peeped out, and lo!
A hundred more are in the sky,
And the harsh night-jar croaks his last:
The owl and he are changing guard.

And in the hedge the huddled birds
Woke from first sleep, and nestled close
With rustling chirps; the darkness fell
Across them like an ominous wing.

And we walked back and lit our lamp,
Started the engine's throb, throb, throb;
And wrapped our towels round our throats,
And crouched our heads against the wind,

And shot along the homeward road
With brightening head-light, while the dark
Deepened before us, till we gained
The lamp-lit, bustling Oxford streets.

I Have Seen Beauty Decay

I HAVE seen Beauty decay,
And, therefore, am old !
For the tale of a man's youth is told
When he has seen Beauty decay.
As the green leaf withers away,
As the bright red iron grows cold :
I have seen Beauty decay.

Love is immortal, they say ;
For ever, to have and to hold.
And young hearts will have it their way,
Love is immortal, they say,
Outdating the tarnish of gold.
But I have seen Beauty decay,
And, therefore, am old.

For a Gift of Roses from a Lady Past Her Youth

ROSES I love when still the rosebud sleeps
In its green-broidered bed,
Or, just awaking, through the curtain peeps
An adolescent head.

Roses I love when—queenly, unafraid,
Nay, bold ; nay, over-free—
Their bright Venetian splendour is displayed
For every eye to see.

And when, just over-blown, their tender part
Is played, and they are old ;
I love them most, when, opening their heart,
They show the hidden gold.

On Seeing a Certain Modern Play

NO, NO ! We are not so ! That merciless eye
Has seen too much, or not enough. Our hearts,
Though mixed of small desires and mean delights,
Are not all thief, all fool, all prostitute.
There must be virtue in the soil that grows
Even the frailest blossom, and the heart
Is not mere dirt, from whence upspring, though rare,
The red heroic rose, and the pale bloom,
Tear-nurtured, of a woman's selfless love.
Do men pluck figs of thistles, grapes from thorns ?

Lines Addressed to a Lady

who complained that a Burlesque of the Author's had spoiled one of her Best Songs

LADY, NOT SO! The nightingale,
Easing its burdened heart at eve,
Heeds not what harsher notes assail
Dull ears, in thickets down the vale;
Cares not what meaner minds conceive.

The moon above the midnight town
Looks silent out on lights that roam,
Like wanton fire-flies, up and down;
And sees, unmoved, without a frown,
The roysterer's lanthorn, creeping home.

You are that bird, that moon is you!
Yours the warm song, the icy ray,
The worship of the woods, your due!
Then spare the fool who blunders through,
Whistling to keep his fears away.

Content you, Moon, nor turn your face
Far from that wanderer in despite;
For he, though fallen from your grace,
Needs more than ever, in this place,
The guiding sweetness of your light.

Content you, Songster! to the skies
  Your music-fountain mounts and swells,
The while his errant footfall flies,
And down the woodland alley dies
  The tinkle of his cap-and-bells.

Rending the sylvan silentness,
  His mortal laugh's no longer heard.
Unbreathing, 'neath the moon's caress,
The whole wide wood is motionless,
  And listen! once again, the bird!

Grace Murray's Presentiment

OUTSIDE MY door, when all was still,
I heard the wind-gust wail and creep ;
And I lay weary, weary,
Upon my bed, yet could not sleep.

What is the weight upon my feet ?
There is no light, I cannot see.
Perhaps it is the cat has crept
Into my room, for company.

No, not the cat ! I, silent, lay,
Nor had been stiller had I died,
While something like a shadow crept
Higher and higher up my side.

My heart was chilled, I moved no limb,
Nor shall be stiller when I die,
Till close against my heart it seemed
The full length of a man to lie.

I started at a touch I knew,
And yet knew not, so strange and cold
It was. I trembled into prayer—
" O God, in loving arms enfold

My husband, far apart from me ! "
The weight fell off, and left my side ;
And, in a dream, I, staring, saw
His new-made coffin, gaping wide.

Invocation

HOW SHALL I name Thee: Goddess, who dost bring
Such joy and sorrow in Thy shadowy hands;
Such echoes from new woods where blackbirds sing,
And such deep-hearted music from grey lands
Where noon comes never,
And only twilight shadows wax and wane,
And over the marshes the night-winds ever
Murmur of pain?

How shall I name Thee: Thou that bringest fear,
Hid in the heart of a sweet, fluttering bliss?
Truly, I tremble when Thou drawest near,
Truly I suck all anguish from Thy kiss.
But, oh! stay long!
Leave me not stretching hungry hands in vain.
Bring me to joy in the Birth of Song,
Even with pain.

Woman, all shapes, all changing shapes are Thine;
All faint and far-off music, all perfume,
All touch, the palate-ecstasy of wine,
All colours mingling at the edge of gloom;
Darkness and light,
The sea's flung spray, the slow tears of the rain,
A dazzled vision beyond sight,
Pleasure and pain.

Mother of all the gods that were, and are;
Mistress of lazars, equal spouse of kings;
Spark from the ruin of a falling star,
And throbbing heart of all created things:
Eternal Muse!
Agony give me; give me not disdain,
Nor even to these lips refuse
Thy kiss of pain.

Thou art the half-seen form that comes by night,
And from the lover's forehead smooths away
Wrinkles of old desire with new delight;
Exacting, while dark quivers into day,
His blood for price.
Yet, so return; for he who once has lain
In that embrace, eyes gazing into eyes,
Will welcome pain.

Thou art the Royal Bee that from her king
Takes all that he, brief monarch, has to give.
Gives death for life, and, for his kiss, a sting.
So, no man may look long on Thee, and live.
But, oh! choose me!
Not mine to hoard the golden mead of gain,
Nor, drone-like, die, since I would be
The Spouse of Pain.

Potiphar's Wife

A Psychological Sonnet-Sequence

I

POOR CHILD ! the while my woman tired my hair
In the first cool of morning, I looked out
From my small chamber on the central square
Of my lord's mansion ; for I heard a shout,
And shuffling feet, and voices hushed in fear ;
And saw the new slaves from the market brought :
Wondering, poor souls, what welcome waited here ;
What lord it was their bodies' use had bought.

And underneath my window stood a youth,
Perhaps of fifteen years, who held his head
Proudly, with desert locks unshorn. In truth
I pitied him, wondering what fortune led
To bonds, and stripes, and unimagined things,
This sapling of the wandering herdman kings.

II

I 'lighted from my chariot at the gate
Of my lord's house ; the horses plunged away.
I saw, among those that at the portal wait,
The young slave I had pitied yesterday.

But changed, for there was bound upon his brow
The Egyptian head-dress, and around his thigh
The Egyptian girdle. Straight he stood as though
His limbs were marble; and his head was high.

I wondered much what inborn power of will,
What sense of honour and his soul's high rank,
Kept him so proudly beautiful, while still
The slave-brand smouldered in his rosy flank.
I yearned towards his smooth cheeks, white and red,
As though he were the son of my own bed.

III

Ah! Joseph, wherefore dost thou haunt my sleep?
In the strong arms of princely Potiphar
All night I lay, but in the shadow deep,
Above the door where the armed eunuchs are,
I saw you stand, or in a vision float;
And o'er my lord's broad shoulder I could see
Your slender arms, and rounded girlish throat;
The long, smooth thighs, the subtly-fashioned knee,
The same high head, the eyes of slumbering fire
With languorous lids, half-shaded, and your mouth,
The very brimful beaker of desire;
A well of sweets to slake my noon-night drought.
And, very red, bent to an arc divine,
Your lips—and, then, my lord pressed his to mine.

IV

Ah ! foolish boy, say not the men who rove
The desert wastes beyond most northern Nile,
So swift in war, are all so slow in love !
Say that they do not understand the smile
Which willing women give them, and the sigh
That is at once despair and hope's new art !
Are you so dull of wit, so bright of eye,
So warm of body, and so chill of heart ?

Behold ! I am the daughter of a race
That princes have desired ; yet when to-day,
Feigning a new command, I bent my face
Over your own, you turned your eyes away ;
Higher than ever held your proud, sweet head,
And your two girlish cheeks blushed deeper red.

V

My room is ready, decked as for a prince !
Ah, could you know the half-forgotten wiles
Re-woven with remembered cunning since
I saw you first, and hungered for your smiles !
Rich cloths are here, pictured with love's delight,
And slender alabaster vases, sweet
With new-plucked flowers, and tender, shaded light,
And soft voluptuous rugs for naked feet,

Laid over marble cool. Warm from the sun,
My love will come, while I, behind the door,
In finest linen clothed, my girdle gone,
Will spill a flask of spikenard on the floor:
So every sense shall ache in him, and light
The flame of love, sweet touch to add to sight.

VI

Nay, Joseph, you must hear me! Raise your eyes.
You know not how I love you; nay, you must!
Surely you know already love's replies
To wisdom's "earth to earth and dust to dust."
I hold you in my arms, you cannot flee.
How warm you are, how vital! Now, your mouth!
A thousand kisses; do but look on me:
'Tis thus we love, we women of the south.
Your bosom beats, I feel it, 'tis for love!
My desert rose, my lily—what is this?
Your eyes are stabs! O Gods, will nothing move
The stone you call your heart? You shun my kiss!
Oh, serpent!—Help! Oh, treachery! Oh, woe!
Joseph, the slave!—Help, varlets! rascals, ho!

VII

So he is fast in prison. Ah, poor fool!
Does he prefer the bed of little ease
To that soft couch I offered, and the school
Of pain to that of love? Well, as you please,

My game-cock prince ! Yet still he haunts my
brain.
I see his long, white body on the rack ;
The whips have torn it—ah, the pain, the pain !
The screw, the fire of glowing coals, the black

And evil face of the king's torturer.
Oh, terrible ! Oh, terrible ! My heart
Shrinks more than his ; I gasp, I pant for air.
But no ! He scorned me. He must bear the
smart !
A woman should be able to forget
Her love, if not her hate. And yet, and yet—.

The Ruins of Glastonbury

WAS IT for this, great Master-architect,
That Thou implanted'st in the mind of man
Such mould of beauty's essence? Who began
These worn foundations, in high hope to erect
Pillars of proof, with antic-sculpture decked,
We cannot wholly know; we only can
Know and abhor the blind, brute Caliban
Whose greed and sychophantic fury wrecked
The hoarded loveliness of countless years!
Yet, pause! yet, stay! God is not here nor there;
His vital Spirit bloweth where it will.
Beauty and wrong are blended everywhere;
Thy perfect righteousness eludes us still;
Yea, Lord, although we seek it long, with tears

In that Strange House . . .

IN THAT strange house did my drugged spirit keep
Its midnight watch. Proud shapes towards me came,
And some were blind, and some had eyes of flame,
And all so sad I could not choose but weep.
Odours encompassed me, I was drowned deep
In balm and musk, and recked no more of shame.
A monstrous loveliness I dare not name
Folded me in its arms, and bade me sleep.

With Titan pang I burst my drowsy chain,
And fled the enchantment, frantic to be free ;
Dying for daylight, panting for pure air.
But when I gained the gate I turned again,
Curious to know what that strange house might be ;
And o'er the door 'twas written—*Baudelaire.*

The Mask of Dante

POOR MORTALS of an introspective age,
Too conscious of the dark that dwells within,
To find our bodies other than a cage,
Whose floor, and roof, and close-set bars are sin—

Not ours are Hermes' brow, Apollo's lip,
The stern-set purpose of harmonious will,
The purity of serene mastership,
Beyond the knowledge of all good and ill.

Yet not for godlike form, for force and grace,
Could I desire one hot-seared wrinkle less,
Carved deep by agony on Dante's face ;
Or wish away the subtler, Christian sense
Which adds to harsh experience, tenderness;
A second purity to innocence.

The Sonnet

THE SONNET is a barred and narrow cell,
No epic plain where armies move at ease,
Nor lyric garden, planted as you please,
Where vague desires and languorous pleasures dwell ;
No rolling ode, sharp with the briny smell
Of far-brought billows, bearing memories
Of wide Atlantic wastes and tropic seas,
Where great ships ride, where breakers heave and swell.

It is a tiny chamber in a tower,
Where the alchemic bosom may distil
Its fivefold essence, and the hermit-eye,
Weary with watching past the midnight hour,
May see, beyond thick bar and narrow sill,
A deeper, because smaller, square of sky.

The Lover-Celebrant

IF HOPE I cherished, then would I forbid
The very flies that buzz upon the pane
To escape alive, and what I would have hid,
Publish abroad in every field and lane.
Dark curtains drawn, thick rugs upon the floor,
No traitor-word should sell me to the air.
Then Secrecy should bar the silent door,
And Jealousy keep watch upon the stair.

But since I have no hope, the gate is wide!
The eyes of all men shall bear out my choice;
While I, Her priest, stand by the altar's side,
Intoning praises with a reverent voice.
To spread Her worship wide is all my care.
Come world, and share my love, and my despair!

The Chestnut

WHEN APRIL melted to May, the mighty chestnut
Outside my window rose like a great green billow,
Hurling itself on the wall of the cliff-like houses,
With a rustle of water, or leaves, poised for an instant.
And when the sun shone out, it found and pierced it,
Showing its cool, green depths and subaqueous shadows,
Its bubbles of filtered light, as the eddy caught it.

But when May hastened to June, like a sudden tempest
Beating against the incoming tide, from landward,
That blows the rollers to spray, and the curled wave broken,
Into white foam each crest is beaten and scattered ;
So was my chestnut wave, my mountain of verdure,
Torn by the Wind of the Year, and each bough budded,
Each little crest of green was flecked with a blossom.

Iconoclastes

" Lord Byron then lodged with the widow of a Greek, who had been British
" Consul. She was, I believe, a respectable person, with several daughters; one
" of whom has been rendered more famous by his Lordship's verses than her degree
" of beauty deserved . . . Whether he really cherished any sincere attachment
" to her I very much doubt . . . It was to this damsel that he addressed the
" stanzas beginning,

' Maid of Athens, ere we part,
Give, oh! give me back my heart.' "

—JOHN GALT'S *Life of Byron.*

BIOGRAPHERS and editors, you show a great facility
In stripping gilt from ginger-bread, and showing us how bare it is;
In pointing out your heroes' more-than-human fallibility,
And treating solemn subjects with your out-of-place hilarities.

For what a poet says he means, in high creative ecstasy,
Is often not a bit the same as what you all allege he meant.
I wonder who will be the wretched victim of your next essay,
Now Shakespeare is a barrister, and Homer is—a regiment!

The bards, who have illuminated half the scroll of history,
Poured forth a gushing stream as broad as Helicon's clear torrent did ;
But what they found to write about is somewhat of a mystery,
Since it is plain their eulogies were, more or less, unwarranted.

We know so much about them all, we've lost our old respect for them ;
The opinion of the journalist has proved, alas ! too strong for us.
What had these girls to offer that a poet's life was wrecked for them ?
What more than we, that bards should never tune their sighing song for us ?

We know Rossetti's drawing was, in many ways, correct-able,
We know his auburn angel was the Mrs. Jones, who sat for him ;
And Mrs. Jones loved Mr. Jones, and was, I'm sure, respectable ;
And if Rossetti loved her, she did not, I hope, care *that* for him.

Oh! have your cold, prosaic way, and let us all be sensible !
Romanticism I'll eschew—the eye's desire, the pride of life

Paint everything in black and white, think colour reprehensible,
And learn, at last, to concentrate upon the seamy side of life.

I'll steal the fame of honeyed lips that laid so long in dust have been ;
Ye Critics, I will learn your trade, and to your aim be dutiful.
Was Petrarch's Laura commonplace ? I rather think she must have been ;
And Dante's Beatrice, was she really very beautiful ?

Fair Helen was a jade whose cheeks had artificial scarlet on,
And no one knows what Paris was about when he abducted her ;
And Circe was a chemist's wife, and Egypt's Queen a charlatan,
And Byron didn't know a pretty woman when he looked at her !

Introspection

MY OVER-CURIOUS spirit found
A dead man's house, and hidden there,
In ancient coffers underground,
A scented glove, a lock of hair;

A book of prayers, laid deep in dust,
An unpaid bill, upbraiding yet;
A pair of pistols, clogged with rust,
A splintered sword, an epaulette.

The house was dark, the shutters fast;
I groped, and found a mouldering stair.
And, climbing, noted as I passed
The serried portraits hanging there.

In each the rats had gnawed away
The painted face. The names were gone
Then, choking back my heart's dismay,
I viewed the cold rooms, one by one.

A bed there was, that still could show
Its draggled counterpane of lace;
A tarnished glass that long ago
Had held the image of his face;

Old tables where, with friends unknown,
He used to take his ease, and dine ;
Cupboards where spiders lived alone,
And bottles that had once held wine.

Then, fearing strangeness made me blind,
I walked that dead man's house again ;
Till at the end I chanced to find,
Stopping a broken window-pane,

A letter—worthy treasure-trove !
Damp-mouldered. Held against the light,
I read the single word of love,
But whom he loved was blotted quite.

So, searching ever high and low,
Into his secret heart I pried :
The only thing I do not know
Is how, and when, and why he died.

Forty Years On

I DINED with old Sir James the other night.
He met me at the Club, and took me home;
Said he admired a thing of mine he'd seen
In the *London Mercury* some months ago.
You may be sure I took him at his word.
His cellar's famous, and his house is full
Of treasures—pictures, things of every kind.
We got a taxi near the "Ritz," and soon
Were at his door—the edge of Regent's Park;
The house is—Something Terrace. I forget.
The butler let us in. "I never take
A latch-key" said Sir James.
The hall was white,
Blue-spaced with Chinese hangings; a lithe bronze
Or two gleamed dark, and on the floor
A thick-pile carpet muffled every tread.
He left me in his study while he changed—
"Only a velvet jacket, my dear boy!"
And I looked at his books; was glad to note
He cut his first editions, probably
With that blue agate knife upon the desk.
Soon he appeared again, and rang the bell
For sherry—"Wretched things these cock-tails are!
I hope you never drink 'em."
Then the gong
Sounded, and in we went. A handsome room

He had to dine in ; high and sombre walls,
As dining-rooms should have, with tapestry
And dark old wood. A beaten-copper lamp
Hung over the long table, smooth as glass.
A plate-mat of fine lace, a silver dish,
And two-pronged cutlery ; the fruit-knives, gold.
A gilt Renaissance goblet—" Nuremberg ;
End of the Sixteenth Century," he said.
The soup went by in silence ; we consumed
Purée de riz with cheese straws—very good.
Then he began to talk.

" I've ordered up
An interesting old wine, *Chateau Latour*
Of 1899, the best there is.
It's being slightly warmed by Jenkinson.
I do not put my claret into ice,
Like that barbarian, Bloughram. Tell me now,
Are you young men still interested in wine ?
And *gourmandise* still has its devotees ?
You've read your Brillat-Savarin, of course ;
Though he neglected liquor, for which fault,
Does Baudelaire upbraid him in strong terms.
But still, he's sound enough. I think one should
Know what a dish is made of. This one now,
This *Saumon à la Régence*, is composed,
Besides, of course, the necessary fish,
Of force-meat with chopped truffles—by the way,
That truffles are an aphrodisiac
Is now disproved, they tell me—and a sauce
Made from the wine of Périgueux. I hope
You find it to your liking ? Good ! You do.

Why is it regents always love to dine?
I set out long ago to make myself
A connoisseur of everything. Each sense,
I'm certain of it, can be so refined,
So organised and played on, to become
The keyboard of an instrument, from whence
A master-hand can draw sweet harmonies.
Huysmans, you will remember, talks of scents:
Comparing them to harps and violins,
And conjures from them symphonies and fugues.
I have the manuscript of *A Rebours;*
I'll show it to you afterwards. He went
At last, poor man, to Rome. I've not done that,
Though conscious of the spell. Who would not be?
I've often thought that long ago, in youth,
Two choices both lay open to my hand.
I could have been a saint—or what I am,
And chose the latter. Did I choose amiss?
I think I always meant to go this way,
And having ground each sense to a fine edge,
And garnered conoisseurship's every sweet,
Repudiate it with a gesture! Strange,
Such thoughts should hang about me. Even now
It's not too late; perhaps I'll do it yet!
And know that last delight, that final bliss—
Still, you observe, I speak *en connaisseur*—
That ultimate *volupté* of the saint.
You're not a Catholic, are you? Nor am I.
Yet were I anything, it should be that.
The Papacy—I gasp to think of it;
A brazen fortress, indestructible!

And that primeval rite of bread and wine,
To eat and drink the god ! It takes one back
To Dionysus, and to Mithras too :
Underground temples, secret devotees,
Pure ecstasy, a holy drunkenness !
These symbols are eternal—God, Who died !
A tortured deity ; Osiris, Christ !
And how they've kept it up, remember that.
Not shrivelled it to ethics, sucked its blood,
Castrated it to Nonconformity.
A pity grouse is out ! This capon here
Must serve our turn. No ortolans for me !
That Bulwer Lyttonism's out of date ;
And grouse is very much the better bird.
What was I saying ? Ah ! the Church of Rome !
I still take pleasure in a perfect Mass,
With plain-song, understand, no fripperies,
Baroque or *rococo*, though even that
Is good in certain moods, but—frivolous.
True connoisseurship is a serious thing ;
Even a sad thing. Only subtle minds—
Too subtle to be healthy, you may think—
Can taste the flavour of a ritual,
And suck the curious sweet of piety
Refined to a sensation. By the way,
Talking of sweets, you'd better drink your wine.
The *gateau's* frozen. You can have some port,
After the savoury has re-warmed your tongue.
Ices, or so they say, began in France
About the time of our Elizabeth,
Brought in by that Italian Catharine,

UPB

Who loved cold dishes—and cold steel. You know—
The Massacre of St. Bartholomew.
It's difficult to get exactly right
The freezing of these ices. College *chefs*,
In my time, always made them much too cold.
They gave a man a pain behind the eyes.

If you prefer it, I will tell my man
To bring the port into the other room?
Some walnuts, too, I fancy. Shall we go?

Know anything of lacquer? This small box
Is thought a masterpiece by those who know.
Marvellous artists were the Japanese!
They knew their glorious business—though it is
The fashion to despise them now, I know,
In favour of their neighbours. It will pass.
To judge them by the colour-prints—absurd!
The Ukiyoyé was a minor school.
It's to reduce the whole of English art
To Gladys Cooper's picture-post-card face.
A gentleman, you know, of old Japan
Was skilled in all the arts—calligraphy,
Music and painting, the tea-ceremony,
And connoisseurship of the blades of swords.
A pleasant list! I wish we were as fine.

Try this old brandy, true *Courvoisier*.
My dealer swears it's 1848,
The Year of Revolutions; think of that!
He offered me some 1789,

But I was sceptical. Nothing survives
Beyond Napoleon ; he was the end
Of the old world. Everything since is new
And different. Those times return no more ;
Though London in the "'eighties" wasn't bad.
Now there's an end of elegance, and art,
And wit, and beauty. Perhaps you don't agree ?
Oh ! Woman is the same, I grant you that !
The blondes are still as sugary as before,
And brunettes just as *piquante*—so they say.
And I confess I rather like bobbed-hair.
It's boyish, *Cinquecento*, has its charm.
I wish men still had clothes like those they wore
In Florence under Il Magnifico.
Short tunics and long tights ; it showed the waist,
And made the most of shapely legs and thighs.
The modern tailor loves the adipose,
As I myself am now, I grieve to say.
But I should hate long coats, if I were you.
You'll have another glass of brandy ? No ?
Allow me, won't you ? Try a mild cigar ?
Afraid that you must go ? The night is young.
You've told me nothing of yourself. Well, well.
I mustn't keep you. Nice of you to come.
I hope you'll come again when you have time ;
I have some pictures you might like to see,
Some evening. Ring me up, and let me know ! "

He saw me to the door ; I shook his hand,
And said a warm "good night" ; then stumbled
down

The broad steps to the dark, deserted street ;
And under the faint stars I bared my head.

If that's myself in forty years—No ! No !
The hermit's cloak, the desert cell for me !

Complexities

IF WE had been single-celled creatures,
Or fishes that never embrace ;
If I had blind scales for my features,
And you had a blank for a face ;
If our hands, or our feet, had been missing,
Or our bodies been cold as a stone,
If our lips were unfashioned for kissing—
Could we be more completely alone ?

Alas ! my love, though I can feel your heart
Beat close to mine, I know we never shall
Know one another wholly. You escape
Whene'er I try to touch you, like the cloud
Ixion loved in error for his queen.
Come closer, love, come closer ! Maybe yet
The miracle will happen ! Breast to breast,
Do we melt now ? Do we mingle ?
All in vain !
Life was complete, what hand divided it ?
And in the place of what was round and whole,
Set Adam and Eve in Eden, hand in hand,
With all the tragic Universe between ?

I must be lonely always, though I stay.
You make my state more bitter. Let me go !

1/20/32
Chap.